

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9683

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BANGUI 2828

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PFOR, CT

SUBJ: L'AN II - A LOOK AT THE FUTURE FOR BOKASSA'S EMPIRE

REF: BANGUI 2650, BANGUI 2603

SUMMARY: THE CORONATION IS OVER AND BOKASSA MUST NOW LOOK TO THE FUTURE OF HIS EMPIRE. THE STATE COFFERS ARE EMPTY, PUBLIC SUPPORT IS LUKEWARM, AND THE COUNTRY IS ISOLATED POLITICALLY. THE COMING YEAR IS LIKELY TO SEE EFFORTS TO DEVELOP THE INSTITUTIONS AND PERHAPS ALSO THE MONUMENTS OF THE EMPIRE, TO RE-ESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH AFRICAN STATES AND TO GET AID FLOWING AGAIN. IN THIS SITUATION OUR LIMITED INTERESTS DICTATE A LOW-KEY APPROACH TO THE CAE CONCENTRATING ON OUR HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS AND OUR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE A MORE LIBERAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANCE. END SUMMARY.

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1. IF THE BUNTING HAS NOT YET BEEN TAKEN DOWN, AT LEAST THE DUST HAS BEGUN TO SETTLE AFTER BOKASSA'S DECEMBER 4 CORONATION. THE LAST ROYAL GUESTS HAVE GONE, EACH MINISTER HAS RECEIVED A NEW LIMOUSINE AND BOKASSA IS BACK AT THE "ANCESTRAL COURT" OF BERENGO. PERHAPS IT IS ONLY WEARINESS WITH CEREMONIES AND FESTIVITIES, BUT BANGUI FOR THE MOMENT SEEMS MORE SOMNOLENT

THAN EVER. AS THE EMPIRE ENTERS ITS SECOND YEAR, ONE WONDERS WHETHER THIS SOMNOLENCE IS A TRANSITORY PHENOMENON ARISING FROM CORONATION FATIGUE, A RETURN TO THE LOW LEVEL OF POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF PAST YEARS OR THE QUIET BEFORE THE STORM. WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THE EMPIRE AND THE EMPEROR?

2. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN SO; BUT NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE "L'ETAT C'EST MOI" IS THE MOTTO OF BOKASSA'S RULE. ALTHOUGH THE SYMBOLS OF HIS EMPIRE ARE NAPOLEONIC, THE SYSTEM BOKASSA HAS CREATED IS MORE A THROW-BACK TO LOUIS XIV, WHERE SUMPTUARY EXPENSES AND COURT PROTOCOL BECAME THE BASIS FOR POLITICAL MANIPULATION AND THE SUBORDINATION OF OPPONENTS TO THE ROYAL WILL. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT AS THE EMPIRE EVOLVES, BOKASSA WILL GIVE INCREASING ATTENTION TO THE CEREMONIAL ASPECTS OF HIS REGIME. THE CORONATION ITSELF REPRESENTED THE PERSONAL GRATIFICATION OF BOKASSA'S WHIMS. NO EXPENSE WAS SPARED TO HUMOR HIS VANITY OR TO PANDER TO HIS TASTES, EVEN THOUGH A FURTHER IMPOVERISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL BUDGET WAS THE RESULT.

3. THE NEXT YEAR COULD SEE A CONTINUATION OF THIS TREND: BOKASSA HAS LONG SEEN HIMSELF AS A "MASTER-BUILDER" AND HE MAY WELL WANT TO EXPAND HIS PALACES, ELABORATE IMPERIAL RITUALS AND BUILD AN EVEN MORE MONUMENTAL SUPERSTRUCTURE AROUND HIS REGIME. MONEY FOR THESE PURPOSES WOULD HAVE TO BE SIPHONED OFF FROM THE NATIONAL BUDGET AND FROM THE VARIOUS PARASTATAL ENTERPRISES IN WHICH BOKASSA HAS A PERSONAL STAKE, UNLESS AS

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IS NOW RUMORED THE NORTH KOREANS COME FORWARD WITH A \$2-3 MILLION GRANT FOR A NEW PALACE AT BERENGO. THE GOCAE'S CONTRIBUTION TO ITS OWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WILL CONTINUE AT A LOW LEVEL, AT LEAST UNTIL THE CORONATION BILLS ARE PAID AND PROBABLY LONGER DEPENDING ON HOW MUCH BOKASSA DECIDES TO EMBELLISH THE EMPIRE. THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IS ANALYSED SEPTEL.

4. THE POLITICAL FUTURE IS UNCERTAIN. BOKASSA'S RULE REMAINS AS IRON-FISTED AS EVER, THOUGH HIS TACTICS MAY HAVE BECOME MORE SUBTLE. HE IS COMMITTED TO A LIBERALIZATION OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM THROUGH THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BASED ON UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE. WE EXPECT HIM TO MOVE TO IMPLEMENT THIS COMMITMENT THOUGH ONLY WHEN HE HAS SATISFIED HIMSELF THAT THE CANDIDATES CHOSEN THROUGH MESAN ARE LOYAL TO HIM. THESE CHANGES, IF AND WHEN THEY TAKE PLACE, MAY BE LITTLE MORE THAN WINDOW-DRESSING FOR HIS ARBITRARY RULE, BUT THEY WOULD BE AT LEAST A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

5. THE CORONATION HAS NOT ADDED TO BOKASSA'S POPULARITY; IN FACT, HE IS PROBABLY REGARDED WITH MORE CYNICISM THAN EVER BEFORE. NONETHELESS, THERE IS NO ORGANIZED OPPOSITION. HE KEEPS HIS OPPONENTS OFF BALANCE BY HIS SHREWD USE OF INTIMIDATION AND HIS

FRIENDS LOYAL BY GENEROUS INCENTIVES BACKED BY THE THREAT OF DISFAVOR AND IMPRISONMENT. RECENT WIDESPREAD PROMOTIONS IN THE ARMY AND THE POLICE ARE PRESUMABLY DESIGNED TO MAINTAIN THE SUPPORT OF THESE KEY GROUPS. THE LEVEL OF DISILLUSIONMENT DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE REACHED A POINT WHICH MIGHT THREATEN HIS REGIME. IT IS, OF COURSE, POSSIBLE THAT SOMEONE, EVEN WITHIN HIS OWN INTIMATE CIRCLE, COULD MOVE AGAINST HIM. OF SUCH A MOVE WE ARE UNLIKELY TO BE FOREWARNED. WE MUST THUS ASSUME THAT BOKASSA IS HERE TO STAY FOR SOME TIME TO COME, DESPITE STEADILY AND SURELY RISING DISCONTENT AMONG THE INTELLIGENTSIA AND THE YOUNGER ELITES IN THE COUNTRY. FOR THE MOMENT, CENTRAL AFRICANS APPEAR TO HAVE IMPLICITLY DECIDED THAT IT IS BETTER TO HAVE STABILITY, ALBEIT WITH LIMITED ECONOMIC GROWTH AND OCCASIONAL IMPRISONMENT THAN TO HAVE THE DISRUPTION, UNCERTAINTY AND

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POSSIBLE WIDESPREAD KILLINGS WHICH WOULD ACCOMPANY A COUP. PERHAPS SOONER OR LATER THEY WILL HAVE HAD ENOUGH, BUT FOR THE TIME BEING THEIR SELF-INTEREST DICTATES GRUDGING AND GRUMBLING ACQUIESCENCE.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BANGUI 2828

LIMDIS

6. AS YET THE RADICALIZATION OF THE YOUNGER GENERATION IS LIMITED AND MOST CENTRAL AFRICANS ARE CONSERVATIVE AND PASSIVE. THE SOVIET UNION IS PLAYING A WAITING GAME AND IS CONCENTRATING ITS EFFORTS ON TEACHING AND TRAINING PROGRAMS DESIGNED TO CREATE A NUCLEUS OF CENTRAL AFRICANS SENSITIVE TO AND SUPPORTIVE OF THE COMMUNIST WORLD VIEW. THE INFORMATION MINISTER'S DIATRIBE AGAINST US ON DECEMBER 7 (BANGUI 2666) SUGGESTS THAT THEY ARE BEGINNING TO HAVE SOME SUCCESS AND THAT THE USE OF CERTAIN RADICAL SLOGANS IS PERMISSIBLE EVEN WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF BOKASSA'S OFT-PROCLAIMED ALLEGIANCE TO THE WEST. HOWEVER, FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, NEITHER THE SOVIETS AND THEIR ALLIES NOR THE CHINESE SERIOUSLY THREATEN OUR INTERESTS.

7. THE FRENCH REMAIN THE CRITICAL FACTOR IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EQUATION. THEIR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM STILL OVERSHADOWS ALL OTHER AID PUT TOGETHER. THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE EDUCATION, HEALTH
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AND TRANSPORTATION SECTORS IS CRITICAL -- WITHOUT THEM THE SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITY COULD NOT FUNCTION; THE HOSPITALS WOULD BE WITHOUT STAFF AND THE RIVER AND ROAD NETWORK WOULD GO UNMAINTAINED. THEIR ENTHUSIASM FOR BOKASSA AND HIS EGREGARIOUS EXTRAVAGANCES HAS CERTAINLY WANED AND THEY ARE INCREASINGLY RELUCTANT EITHER TO BANKROLL HIS PERSONAL LIFESTYLE OR TO ARM HIS GROWING FORCES. NONETHELESS, THEY PERCEIVE THEIR INTERESTS TO BE REAL AND IMPORTANT: CULTURAL INFLUENCE; A STRONGLY ANTI-COMMUNIST AND PRO-FRENCH GOVERNMENT; ACCESS TO THE COUNTRY'S MINERAL RESOURCES INCLUDING ITS URANIUM; A SENSE OF THE POLITICAL SOLIDARITY OF THE FORMER FRENCH EMPIRE; AND A LARGE AND OFTEN PROFITABLE STAKE IN THE LOCAL ECONOMY. THEY ARE UNLIKELY TO RISK THESE INTERESTS BY PUNITIVE OR HARSHLY RESTRICTIVE POLICIES TOWARD THE CAE, HOWEVER MUCH THEY WOULD PREFER FOR THEIR OWN DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND OTHER REASONS NOT TO IDENTIFY TOO CLOSELY WITH BOKASSA.

8. IN GENERAL BOKASSA WILL BE SEEKING STABILITY IN HIS EXTERNAL RELATIONS. ISOLATED FROM HIS AFRICAN NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS AT THE TIME OF THE CORONATION, HE WILL TRY TO RE-ESTABLISH TRADITIONAL TIES. HIS VISIT TO LIBREVILLE FOR THE UDEAC SUMMIT WAS THE FIRST STEP IN THIS DIRECTION. WE WOULD ANTICIPATE AN EXPANDED PROGRAM OF TRAVEL AND A WILLINGNESS TO RECEIVE SUCH OLD-TIME FRIENDS AS HOUPHOUET EARLY IN THE NEW YEAR. WITH NON-AFRICAN POWERS HE WILL WANT TO HAVE BUSINESS AS USUAL, I.E. A CONTINUATION OF RELATIONSHIPS WHICH PERMIT AID TO FLOW. HE WILL NOT WANT TO OFFEND ANYONE NEEDLESSLY, AND MOST COUNTRIES IN THE SHORT RUN AT LEAST CAN LOOK FORWARD TO STABILITY IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE CAE.

9.WHERE DOES THAT LEAVE THE UNITED STATES: BETWEEN THE EAST'S WAITING GAME AND THE WEST'S (FRANCE'S) UNENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT. OUR INTERESTS REMAIN LIMITED: THE RUSSIAN THREAT IS RELATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

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UNIMPORTANT; OUR ECONOMIC STAKE IS UNLIKELY TO GROW, UNLESS WE ARE ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE EXPLORATION OF THE COUNTRY'S URANIUM; BOKASSA'S FRIENDSHIP AND POLITICAL SUPPORT ARE MORE OF AN EMBARRASSMENT THAN A HELP, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICA. WE DO, OF COURSE, HAVE HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS AND OBJECTIVES: IN TERMS OF POLITICAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. WE HAVE AN INTEREST IN SEEING A POSITIVE POLITICAL EVOLUTION AWAY FROM THE ARBITRARY ONE-MAN RULE OF THE PAST.

10. IN THE NEXT YEAR, HOWEVER, WE WILL HAVE ONLY A LIMITED ABILITY TO ACHIEVE THESE OBJECTIVES. OUR EXISTING AID AND PEACE CORPS PROGRAMS IN THE FIELDS OF HEALTH, AGRICULTURE AND VILLAGE LEVEL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT ARE MAKING A DIRECT AND VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE RURAL POOR IN SPITE OF THEIR FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS. THEY SHOULD BE CONTINUED TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE UNDER CURRENT POLICY GUIDELINES. OUR EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM AND OUR AID AND PEACE CORPS ACTIVITIES IN THE FIELD OF TRAINING ARE ALSO LIMITED BUT ARE LESS AFFECTED BY OUR DECISION LAST SEPTEMBER TO POSTPONE NEW AID PROJECTS. THESE TRAINING EFFORTS ARE DESIRED BY THE CAE GOVERNMENT, ARE NOT FUNGIBLE, ARE OF LONG TERM BENEFIT TO THE COUNTRY AND HELP CREATE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE U. S. IN THE CAE. THEY SHOULD BE EXPANDED IF AT ALL POSSIBLE, IF ONLY FOR THE REASON THAT WE MUST LOOK BEYOND BOKASSA TO THE DAY WHEN HE NO LONGER DOMINATES THE SCENE AND WHEN A NEW GENERATION OF CENTRAL AFRICANS TAKES OVER.

11. IN THE MEANTIME WE WILL HAVE TO WORK WITH BOKASSA. IN RECENT MONTHS WE HAVE ESTABLISHED A REASONABLE DIALOGUE WITH HIM. HE NEEDS FRIENDS. HE WILL NOT WANT TO PROVOKE US GRATUITOUSLY, ALTHOUGH HE STILL UNDOUBTEDLY ASSUMES HE CAN MANIPULATE US TO HIS PURPOSES WITH A CARROT AND STICK APPROACH: VIZ THE ATTACKS ON OUR HUMAN RIGHTS STANCE AT THE SAME TIME THAT HE WAS SENDING A WARM AND CONCILIATORY MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT CARTER. HE KNOWS OUR HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS AND HAS ALREADY RESPONDED TO THEM; HE HOPES HE CAN GET ACROSS TO US HIS CONCERNS. OUR TASK WILL

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BE TO USE OUR LIMITED INFLUENCE TO TRANSFORM SOME OF HIS ASSURANCES INTO DEEDS: TO ENCOURAGE THE CREATION OF THE

INSTITUTIONS PROVIDED FOR IN THE CONSTITUTION, THE CONTINUANCE
OF THE CURRENTLY REDUCED LEVEL OF POLICE BRUTALITY AND THE

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INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PROTECTIVE MECHANISMS FOR OUR OWN
CITIZENS THROUGH A CONSULAR CONVENTION AND A DIRECT AND OPEN
DIALOGUE WITH BOKASSA AND HIS MINISTERS. THESE OBJECTIVES
ARE MORE THAN A FULL AGENDA FOR 1978.
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